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ABSTRACT

The bases for the current concern with social engineering in psychology is attributed to: (1) the recognition that man must be viewed in a social framework, and (2) the recognition of the importance of environmental influences in determining behavior. However, the distinction is made between the social obligations of a psychologist as a citizen and his obligations as a professional. The main concern of the psychologist lies in the study of small groups and individuals. Social reform on the large-group and institutional level is in the domain of other behavioral scientists: anthropologists, sociologists, and political scientists. The need and value of retaining psychotherapy and individual treatment as sources of self-initiated change is emphasized. Three suggestions are made for the professional contribution of psychology in the field of social reform. First, psychologists should involve themselves in changing social institutions in which they are involved. Second, psychologists should serve as consultants to governmental agencies which implement change. Third, and most important, psychologists should concern themselves with the development of methods for fostering good human relations by changing the social stimuli to which individuals are subjected. (SR)

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The Social Responsibility of Psychology *

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The theme for this 77th Annual APA Convention is "Psychology and the Problems of Society". Psychologists, along with many other people, have become intensely aware that we do not live in the best of all possible worlds, that in fact the world is a pretty miserable place for many if not most human beings. That things could be better, few will deny. The discrepancy between what is and what could be can and should be narrowed if not eliminated. Surely psychology has something to offer to a society torn with strife, with individuals and groups demanding changes which will provide, or which they think will provide, a better life. Many psychologists are urging that the profession become more active in solving society's problems, and that individual psychologists become activists as well.

The bases for the current concern with social engineering in psychology seems to me to be two. First is the increasing recognition that man is a social being and must be seen in a social framework. The second is the recognition that environmental influences are important in determining behavior. A corollary of this is the realization that many persons today are the victims of unfavorable, even intolerably bad environmental conditions which have psychological implications. Psychologists--especially counseling and clinical psychologists-- are concerned about people, and thus want to do something about this state of affairs. To many, helping individuals is no longer satisfying, since it is possible to help only a few. Moreover, if the problems of individuals are not their problems, but originate in society, so that the individual has no control over the solution to his problem, the frustration of the psychologist is understandable.

It is thus contended, to quote Peterson (1968, p. 91) that "changes of a cultural kind can be of much more general and lasting benefit than any individual treatment, however effective the latter may be." Let us ignore the obvious overgeneralization of this statement and admit that there are many individuals whose problems derive from harmful social conditions that should and must be changed.

This is not, of course, a new problem; it is only that psychologists have become more acutely aware of the problem and of the need to do something about it. Psychologists are Johnny-come latelys to the scene. Sociologists have for more than half a century been concerned about the social origins of emotional disturbances or behavioral disorders, to use the new term. For example, in 1936, L. K. Frank published an article entitled "Society as the Patient" (1936). Social psychiatry has been on the scene for at least a couple of decades. This has led to such approaches as the interpersonal therapy of Sullivan, milieu therapy, and the therapeutic community. And, as Peterson (1968, p. 50) notes, "sociological change operations have also been addressed to the more general organization of social systems in the community at large, and to the preventive and therapeutic effects of the way societies function as a whole. Community mental health and community psychology have been employed as terms to designate social actions of this kind." Peterson discusses the terms used to refer to this effort, such as social psychiatry and commumity psychology, and suggests that social engineering would be preferable, in

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part because it is "neutral about professional hegemonies among those who are to do the work" (1968, p. 51). Others than the professions have of course been concerned--social reformers, politicians and statesmen, and now college youth, blacks, and the disadvantaged themselves.

It cannot be denied that, now that we have fully recognized what Sullivan and the sociologists have been emphasizing, we should be concerned about doing something about it. But the point is that the problem is one that requires the efforts of many groups. Psychologists have neither the total answer nor the total responsibility, no matter how arrogant they may feel about their knowledge or how guilty they may feel about their past failure to assume any responsibility. Psychology is not going to be the knight in shining armor riding up at the last minute to provide the solution to the problem. The reform of society is not the sole responsibility of psychology. Psychology has no monopoly, nor even any special expertise here. Other professions -- anthropology, sociology, political science -- have at least as much if not more to contribute to effective methods of social change since these disciplines have been concerned with the actions of large groups while psychology has been concerned mainly with the study of small group activities. And, of course, when it comes to the actual change process, it is mainly through nonprofessionals--politicians, statesman, social reform organizations, etc. -- that change occurs. Psychologists certainly may be active here, but as individual citizens rather than as representatives of a profession.

To quote Peterson again (1968, p. 237), "the question no longer is whether social scientists and professional mental health workers should be involved in social engineering and the control of human behavior, but how much and what kind of engagement is appropriate.... The politicians, financiers, and others who direct our society are not likely to deliver authority and power to professional do gooders without reservation and sometimes without a fight. Even if they would, it is undesirable that they should. The design of a democratic society must never be dictated by a single group."

The question is, what is the responsibility of psychology and psychologists; how can they contribute most effectively to positive social change? Individual therapy is not enough, and it does not--except perhaps indirectly to some extent--correct the social determinants of individual disorder.

The solution which is being suggested by many counseling and clinical psychologists is the abandonment of individual counseling or psychotherapy. The doors of the clinic and consulting room should be closed--but without the therapist and client being left inside. Everyone, it seems, should be moving out into the community. But it is never very clear just what they are to do there. Some seem to be advocating that they march in picket lines, lead or start riots, or at least engage in social movements as an activist.

Now all these things may be appropriate for a psychologist as an individual and as a citizen. Perhaps it is not too much to expect that all citizens with a professional education should be involved in some way in the effort to better social conditions. But we should not expect that psychologists as <u>psychologists</u> must be activists, and identifying themselves by carrying signs saying, "I am a psycholotist." And there are many ways in which individuals can work toward social improvement. Everyone should not be expected to do it in the same way, or in ways

which activists think they should. Nor should those psychologists who do not choose to be activists be made to feel that they are no longer psychologists. There are some who seem to want to redefine the position description of the counseling psychologist to include some such statement as "Every counseling psychologist must walk in at least one picket line a week." There seems to be confusion between the obligations of a psychologist as a psychologist, and as a citizen.

In my earlier paper (Patterson, 1969) my plea was that psychology not abandon psychotherapy, individual or group, for unknown, untried activities or espouse social action as the only desirable or respected activity for a psychologist. I am still of this opinion. There are of course other methods than psychotherapy for changing or modifying individual and group behavior. Psychotherapy is probably appropriate for a small percentage of those with problems. But other methods, which usually involve more direct intervention and control, raise problems involving ethical and social values which have not been adequately faced by the behaviorists. In spite of the propaganda that the client determines the goals, this is not always the case. I have become concerned about the increasing number of reports of intervention in the lives of individuals and groups where the goals have been selected and imposed by the experimenter. It must also be remembered that much of the immediate social environment is a psychological environment and the client is part of it, and has some responsibility to change his own environment as well as some ability to do so if he is helped through individual or group therapy. It is still worth emphasizing that self-initiated and self-controlled change may be more desirable than change induced and directed by an outside agent.

This is not to deny that some environments--or some aspects of the environment--cannot be changed by the individual. Certainly psychologists--as well as social workers, teachers, parents, etc. -- have some responsibility for changing environments for those unfortunate individuals who cannot do so for themselves. It is also true that there are some aspects of the environment that are harmful for large numbers of individuals, and these require large-scale social changes. But this is where the psychologist as a professional reaches his limits as far as direct change is concerned, though within the limits of an institution, such as the school, he has a professional responsibility for attempting change.

This leads to the suggestion of three ways in which psychology can make its contribution--its unique professional contribution--to our social problems.

1. First, the movement towards involvement in the social systems in which people are immediately and directly involved is desirable. This includes the primary groups to which the client belongs, usually limited to the family in our present society, and other groups such as schools, mental hospitals, and clinics. Changes in the operation of these institutions are clearly necessary.

I cannot help but introduce one of my peeves here in the suggestion that before psychologists take over the reform of society they first ought to do something about changing practices in institutions where they have been working for years--clinics, mental hospitals, public schools and schools for the retarded. Instead of spending most of their time administering tests, diagnosing and evaluating clients and writing lengthy reports of their findings which are of no value to anyone, psychologists should engage in treatment and other efforts to change behavior. The tremendous waste of time and money in the ritual of testing and

diagnosis should be of concern to a socially conscious psychologist and could well become a social scandal if it were exposed by someone like Martin Gross.

Perhaps we should move toward the "social intervention centers" proposed by Albee, which would be staffed by special education teachers, social welfare workers, counselors, psychologists and psychiatrists. The latter two would be teachers and researchers, as well as supervisors and consultants, and also social activists, pushing for changes in the community environment to make it less dehumanizing. But two things must be noted here. First, individual and group counseling should be available for those who need it. Second, the limits of the effectiveness of individuals in achieving broad social changes must be recognized, or the frustration involved could lead to the need for psychotherapy by the psychologists and psychiatrists.

2. Psychology and psychologists, on the basis of their professional knowledge, should serve as consultants to government bodies engaged in the implementation of social changes at all levels of government. For too long has government neglected to consult the social sciences, while implementing the technology of the physical sciences with little concern for their psychological consequences. The establishment of a National Social Science Foundation becomes important here, and psychologists interested in social change should press for such a foundation.

3. But perhaps the most direct and, in the long run, most effective contribution of psychology is in the area of fostering the development of good interpersonal relationships. When the problems of the production and distribution of material goods and services have been solved, when we no longer have poor nations or poor minorities, slums, or hunger, we will still have the problems of living together. This would seem to be the area in which psychology would have responsibility. Beyond the conditions necessary for physical survival and optimum physical functioning, man's needs are psychological in nature. The conditions for optimum psychological functioning need to be determined and made available for every individual. This calls for research and the dissemination of the results of research through teaching. As a matter of fact, we now know at least some of the conditions for good human relationships. The preoccupation of the behaviorists with technology and techniques for behavior change may delay the recognition of the basic problem as one of human relations. Given enough time they will eventually reach this stage. Their need to discover everything for themselves all over again--such as that behavior is influenced by its consequences, and that direct teaching is effective in changing specific behaviors--is delaying progress. Their skepticism of the results of learning by experience rather than by experiment, even though the human experience numbers thousands of years of real life compared to a few hours of a laboratory situation, is another obstacle. But we now know, on the basis of considerable research as well as experience, the basic conditions of good interpersonal relationships. And if these conditions existed universally, the personal psychological problems which now require counseling or psychotherapy could be eliminated. The stimuli which lead to psychologically desired behavior are social--they emanate from other persons. If we wish to control the results of these stimuli, then, in the best behavioral tradition, we should change the stimuli to which the individual is subjected. This means the changing of people so that they will provide good interpersonal relationships for others. If we know some of the principles and conditions of such relationships then it behooves us to teach them to everyone in our

society. An illustration of such teaching is the training of police in New York City as family intervention specialists by Bard and Berkowitz (Bard, 1969). If we were successful in this task, then we would have no more need for counseling or psychotherapy. This, ultimately, is the social responsibility of the psychologist.

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